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When Israel Spies on Its Friend, Everyone in Washington Responds

By Richard B. Straus

WASHINGTON

They found some more hands in the cookie jar," was one Administration official's offhand reaction to new evidence revealed last week in the Pollard spy case. A long-awaited Justice Department statement detailed the activities of Jonathan Jay Pollard, a U.S. citizen who has pleaded guilty to spying for Israel, and named four Israelis as unindicted co-conspirators.

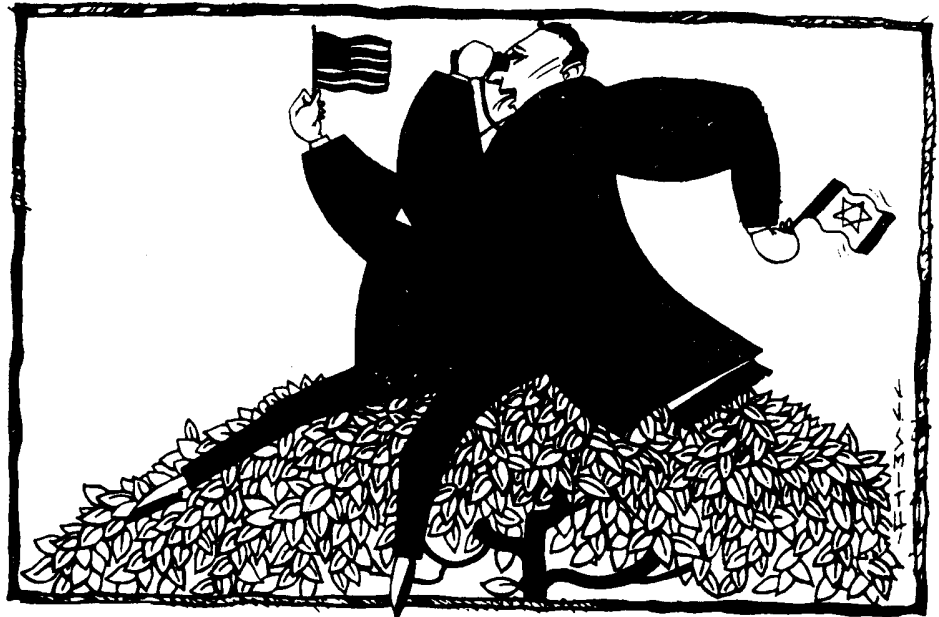
Despite the media uproar, the case presented by the Justice Department added little to the outrage already felt by U.S. officials. "It was like finding out your wife had been cheating on you with two men, not just one," said one well-informed State Department insider. "We are only talking degree. It is the same spy ring."

Some senior Americans do not agree, however. Donald Gregg, national security adviser to Vice President George Bush, in an interview soon after the original disclosure of Pollard's activities, accused the Israelis of having done "things like this for years." In a letter to Kenneth J. Bialkin, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, Bush seemed to support his aide's contention, expressing the "hope that this will be the last case of its kind." Last week, similar sentiments were echoed in Washington.

But are views like those expressed by Bush and Gregg credible? The vice president, after all, is widely known to be unhappy with the degree of trust the Reagan Administration shows for its Israeli ally. And Gregg, a 30-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency, shares with many of his former colleagues a deep suspicion about the intimacy of U.S.-Israeli relations.

As a result, those with such suspicions often view routine information sharing by pro-Israeli American officials as somehow subversive—and incidents like the Pollard case as proof of the extent to which Israel will ruthlessly pursue its own interests.

In fact, while it is true that the ever-resourceful Israelis constantly strive to



JENNIFER JO SMITH / for The Times

gather information in Washington, the same can be said of other "friendly" governments. Moreover, unlike most others, and particularly their Arab competitors, the Israelis are very good at their work.

Operating in a supportive environment on Capitol Hill, with friends in the White House and the upper regions of the State Department, the Israelis assiduously gather information—much of it classified (but then, nearly anything of value in Washington carries a classified stamp).

And they play by their own lights. It does not concern them if an Administration official or Hill staffer is Jewish or not, or whether the conversation will later prove to be embarrassing to him, as long as it is productive. There is only one other capital where anyone can be as free-wheeling and irresponsible—and that is Jerusalem. So the Israelis come to town well-schooled.

But do they violate the rules in gross fashion? Clearly in the Pollard case, they did. Friends of Israel in Congress and the Administration were outraged. "We expect this sort of thing from the Bulgarians or the Russians, but not our friends," said one Administration official.

Nor is this the first instance of the

Israelis allegedly breaking, not just bending, the rules. In the 1980s, the FBI investigated the disappearance of 200 pounds of enriched uranium from a plant operated by a scientist with close ties to the Israeli government. Later, however, the case was closed and no charges were filed. Last May a California businessman was indicted by a federal grand jury for illegally shipping kryptons—electronic devices that can be used in the triggers of nuclear weapons—to Israel. But the Israeli government insisted that the kryptons were for non-nuclear use and promised to return them to the United States.

Now, barring the disclosure of dramatic new evidence, the Pollard case should prove to be no more of a barrier to normal relations between the United States and Israel than either of the two previous incidents. And for the Israelis, business as usual means billions of dollars in aid and unparalleled political, diplomatic support from the Western superpower. For most Americans, it means ever closer ties to a feisty, if sometimes irresponsible, ally. And for official Washington, except for some pockets of resistance—as in the vice president's office—it means, "Here come those folks again, who never take 'no' for an answer." □

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